

Review of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in hydropower projects in Sri Lanka

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Sri Lankan society has supported the development and improvement of water resources for the human well-being through agriculture and energy for a long period. Since the introduction of the National Environmental Act, in 1980 EIA has been widely discussed and implemented for multi-disciplinary projects. EIA was made mandatory for all development projects through a cabinet decision in 1984 but since then EIA process exhibit numerous shortcomings in its implementation. Despite that it was revealed in the comprehensive survey of Sri Lankan National Archives that over 500 EIAs were completed in the period of 1981–2007.

By looking at the Sri Lankan experience in hydropower, we evaluate how the EIA instruments used by the government influence on development. This article addresses both the EIA processes as well as the EIA screening in the development process. It will demonstrate that in the EIA screening process has changed over time for hydro power generation projects and other selected projects due to the higher consumer demand place on water resources based energy and the mooted policy direction of the government. Paper will also investigate the circumstances that forced the government to make a legislative change of the EIA process and try to find whether it has been able to sustain the environmental the social cost caused in the process. For this we will look at two case studies, i.e, the Upper Kotmale hydropower project and the Bomuruella Mini hydropower project.

Key words: Environmental Impact Assessment, Hydropower projects, Water resource, National environmental act, Project screening

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